

A RUNNING/WALKING GROUP IN THE CHURCH:
PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This project deals with the sport of running as it relates to members of a church forming a group to engage in a walking and running activity. The theological framework for such a program under the auspices of the church is found in the theology of play espoused by Moltmann, Cox, and Keen. The psychological dimensions of running are surveyed. A description is given on how the group was organized and the weekly program implemented. Guidelines are presented on how to begin a walking/running group in the church.

The experimental group consisted of twelve middle-aged single adults. A questionnaire and check list survey were given after one year of participation. Positive changes were indicated psychologically and physically. The findings showed increases in self-confidence and an overall sense of well-being. The spirit of aliveness and joy were greatly increased as well as an attitude of optimism. A higher degree of health and fitness and a better self-image were affirmed, along with a reduction of stress and a heightened feeling of energy and endurance.

The formation of a walking or running group in the church is seen as a new form of pastoral care in which both self-esteem and outlook on life are enhanced.

INTRODUCTION

This project deals with the formation of a running/walking group in the church, its psychological value and its theological meaning. Subjective data from group participants on the experience of walking/running will be obtained by questionnaires and self-rating instruments. Theologically, running and exercise are seen as life-enhancing, liberating play which facilitates self-actualization and the experience of joy. Thus, a running group is seen as a new and much needed form of pastoral care. Guidelines are presented for the organization of such groups in the church.

There is a running explosion across the nation, and indeed, around the world. Today, there is no city in America that does not hold its special races: marathons, half-marathons, and ten kilometer runs. Joggers and runners are seen and accepted as a routine part of the landscape everywhere. It's as though a secret began to leak out that the sport of running was one of the most effective ways to become thin, to look younger, and regain some vigor in one's life! In many circles running has come to be the preventive therapy for the maintenance of good health, especially cardiovascular and respiratory health. And to punctuate this, running is now prescribed as the functional treatment of recovery for postoperative heart patients. Some insurance companies have been convinced of the benefits of vigorous exercise and have begun to offer reduced rates for runners. These are some of the indications

of the psychological dividends of running.

The relevance of running to the church lies in the spiritual, life-enrichment realm and as an expression of play and freedom. In this context, running is what Harvey Cox might call "a festive affirmation of living." In counseling with separated, divorced, or widowed adults, I often discover common experiences of low self-esteem, bad self-image, depression, and a sense of immobility. It is my perception that running, or a program of equivalent aerobic conditioning, can make major and lasting changes not only in how we take care of our bodies, but in what we think of ourselves.

This project will assess the effect of a walking, jogging, running activity on individuals in the church. We will show how such an activity can contribute to the church's ministry to the whole person. We will look at the ramifications of running as it relates to the theology of play and freedom. It is my contention that the theology of play and liberation has been neglected, a theology which speaks of flesh and blood bodies functioning, and experiencing ourselves as children of God.

To my knowledge, no specific work has been done in the area of the church relating to the sport of running. With the current interest in physical fitness and running, there are many books available on the subject, though none of them deal explicitly with the theological dimension of fitness and running. The following books represent major contributions in this field.

The first volume I read was The Joy of Running¹ by Thaddeus

¹Thaddeus Kostrubala, The Joy of Running, (New York: Lippincott, 1976).

Kostrubala, psychiatrist. This book was an inspiration to me and provided a panoramic view of the psychological meaning of running. Dr. George Sheehan, a heart specialist from New Jersey, has become a writer-philosopher on the subject of running. His personal testimony and ideas are in his book Running and Being.² He is also a contributing editor to Runners' World magazine, the leading sport publication in this field. James E. Fixx authored The Complete Book of Running³ which provides overviews of the running experience and attempts to answer all practical questions about the sport such as how to do it, why be a runner, what to expect, the when, where and what of running.

In his book Positive Addiction,⁴ Dr. William Glassor, a psychiatrist, has collected data that involves runners and other athletes and makes a case for positive psychological benefits to those who include running in their life-style. He argues that there is a positive-addiction state of mind that makes stronger, more fulfilled persons in contrast to negative addictions which prey upon weaknesses and become self-destructive.

Dr. Kenneth Cooper contributed the scientific perspective on the health factors of exercise and body conditioning in his book Aerobics⁵ published in the sixties.

²George A. Sheehan, Running and Being, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978).

³James E. Fixx, The Complete Book of Running, (New York: Random House, 1977).

⁴William Glassor, Positive Addiction, (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1976).

⁵Kenneth H. Cooper, Aerobics, (New York: Evans, 1968).

Historically, the Y.M.C.A. has held the concept of a healthy unity of body, mind, and spirit, and that the best physical fitness level which any person can attain enables that individual to function at an efficient level and to enjoy life. To reach this state involves the combination of exercise, proper diet, and a state of mind that is dedicated to health and wholeness. When that happens, the person tends to reject unhealthy things and self-indulgence and moves toward a more self-disciplined life and the goal of a healthier pattern of living.

Private gyms and health clubs have responded to the increased interest in fitness by offering aerobic conditioning courses. Walking, running, swimming and cycling activities lead the way, but scores of other types of sports are finding more participants, especially tennis and racquetball.

Diet books, diet programs, diet fads, and diet clinics abound in our culture and seem to bear witness to the fact of a population majority which is both sedentary and obese. There is a growing interest in business and industry for the fitness of the employees. There is a practical argument that a healthy individual performs better and that staying well is a great deal more cost effective than paying for the medical processes of getting well.

Another background movement which I believe has strongly influenced the fitness and running explosion is that of holistic health. This preventive approach says that by not achieving your full, natural measure of vigor and vitality, you invite not only unnecessary minor illness and unnecessarily rapid aging, but also such things as heart attack, lung disease, or other degenerative afflictions. In this move-

ment, the goals for people enjoying positive wellness are virtually the same goals which seem to motivate people into a jogging/running regimen to enhance their lives. These are some of the ideals set forth in the holistic health movement.

Being trim and physically fit
 Being energetic, vigorous, rarely tired
 Free from minor complaints (headaches, etc.)
 Being alert and clearheaded
 Radiant with clear skin, sparkling eyes
 Self-assured, confident, optimistic
 Satisfied with work and life direction
 Able to assert oneself
 Satisfied with sexual relationships
 Free from destructive health habits
 Fulfilled and at peace with oneself

Perhaps fewer than ten percent of the population enjoy such optimum health. But I sincerely believe that positive wellness is well within the reach of the average person.

It is in the context of many of these ideas that I was motivated to organize a church running group.

It is also my thesis that we must theologically take a good look at the thought that we must become as little children to enter the Kingdom. It leads us into a theology of play and liberation and there is nothing more characteristic about children than their love of play.

Fitness and health may be sound motivators to get started in running but I feel that there is a larger dimension of spirit and joy that carries this activity into a life-style.

Play theology has a spokesman in Sam Keen as he strives to synthesize the carnal and the sacred in his book To a Dancing God.⁶ He

⁶Sam Keen, To A Dancing God, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1970).

makes a claim for a "visceral" theology and believes that the church must become involved in the exploration of ways to reawaken a reverence for the body and its rhythms.

Jürgen Moltmann's essay "The First Liberated Men In Creation"⁷ proposes a theology of play which counter balances the traditional Puritan ethic of work and purpose to justify creation. He makes a case for understanding Homo Ludens as well as Homo Faber; Man the player as well as Man the worker.

Running is one such channel of play and enjoyment in which we can feel our freedom and with that liberation, experience the joy which allows a person to breathe freely and celebrate human existence.

This is an experimental project to explore the relationship of play theology to an aerobic conditioning sport, running. I shall report on a running group made up of church members and describe the how, where and when of this group. I will also gather questionnaire data from the individual members of this walking/running group.

Although there is now an abundance of data and information about the physiological dimensions of running, I will only refer to such material incidentally. This project will not be reporting upon the cardiovascular, pulmonary, and scientific medical studies which provide fitness rationale for running.

The spiritual dimensions of running are only at the threshold of research. My questionnaire and interviews with runners are designed to yield more information on this aspect of running.

⁷Jürgen Moltmann, The Theology of Play, (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

Chapter 1

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF RUNNING

Currently our society puts considerable emphasis on personal development and maximizing one's potential. Self-actualization movements are directed at making us fulfilled human beings. Howard Clinebell, Jr. has said that everyone has within him an impulse to develop his potentialities. In this process of fulfilling one's potential for full aliveness, one experiences inner affirmation and joy.

We are all on a pilgrimage for life enhancement. Today there are innumerable paths to follow and techniques to utilize: growth groups, assertiveness training, meditation, self-hypnosis, est, and the list goes on.

In this chapter I will discuss the psychological benefits that result from running. Most of the runners I have talked with are quick to speak of the emotional dividends and the mental attitudes which come from running. They proclaim a sense of heightened mental energy and concentration and a new awareness of self and the environment.

"People get a relief of tension from running. It's like having your own psychiatrist."¹ The benefits from running may come in ways that are easily recognized or in other ways that are more subtle and

¹James E. Fixx, The Complete Book of Running (New York: Random House, 1977) p. 15.

not readily apparent. One thing that almost always happens is that one's sense of self-worth improves. You accept yourself a little more.

Many people do not have a great deal of freedom in their lives. Running provides a sense of freedom. When you run, you can go at your own speed. You can go where you want to go and think your own thoughts and be quite unaccountable. In this sense, running is a childish and primitive thing to do. That may well be its fundamental appeal. You're moving like a child again and stripping away the non-essentials of society and getting back to a very basic, natural function.

Stemming from his psychiatric practice, Thaddeus Kostrubala has suggested some theories about running. He writes:

We know that certain centers in the brain are directly related to running. The first of these is the cortical motor strip. That is the center of all voluntary motor activity. But with rhythmic slow running, lower centers in the brain apparently begin to take over. We stop thinking about it. It seems as if we could run forever. We suddenly feel free and easy.²

Such a functional activity as running may seem difficult or feel like hard work when we are concentrating on it. But if we just do it long enough it becomes automatic and may actually be transferred to another area of our brain that is less conscious.

Slow long-distance running seems to have the same effect that one would get in a method of meditation or prayer. That is, the constant repetition of a particular word or phrase is intended to open one into another state of awareness. The touching of another state of consciousness is achieved. The repetitive rhythm of slow long-distance running can produce this altered-state effect.

²Thaddeus Kostrubala, The Joy of Running (New York: Lippincott, 1976) p. 103.

An explanation of this altered state process comes from the Freudian model. Beneath our conscious awareness we have our ego, where we talk about the "I" or "me." Beneath this is the personal unconscious which holds forgotten or repressed memories and experiences, the concept which Freud popularized.

Then it was Jung who proposed that there is a deeper layer to the unconscious that held a vast storehouse of symbols he called archetypes. It would be from this area of the collective unconscious that our heritage as a running animal would be represented. According to Jung, our three-million-year heritage is the collective experience of the species. "Within me is the internal representation of a free-running, myth-making, roving, hunter-killer ape."³

The idea of the collective unconscious states that within each of us, the symbolic memories of all our ancestors are collected. The last five thousand years or so are seen as a recent period of civilization which is simply laid upon this deeper structure like a thin coating.

Within this view of personality structure Kostrubala believes that slow long-distance running does something to the established structure of the personality. Running seems to weaken, alter or temporarily loosen the barriers to the collective unconscious. Our most meaningful personal experiences seem to come when we dip into our own deeper drives and creative forces. He says: "If all goes well while running you will begin to resonate with your own self, and the experience will be delight-

³Kostrubala, p. 106.

ful. You may even be touching aspects of your archetypes."⁴

A Triune Brain theory has been proposed by Joseph C. Pearce, author of The Magical Child.⁵ According to this model, the oldest and most primitive part of the brain is reptilian, which we share with fish and reptiles. It controls the heart, blood, circulation, respiration, and provides us with an essential for self-preservation, the ability to get out of danger, the ability to run. The next brain layer he calls the mammalian, the limbic system surrounding that most primitive reptilian brain. It controls our glands and seems to generate emotions and feelings. The third part of the brain, the neocortex, is the most advanced and the most uniquely human. In our highly developed neocortex resides our capacity to reason, to regulate action, to think abstractly, to remember, to anticipate the future, to worry, and perhaps to feel satisfaction. This is also the area which provides us with vision.

This conceptual scheme gives us another model for interpreting the mental, psychological or mystic experiences of long distance running. For some activities it may well be that all parts of the brain are simultaneously involved, but for running, those parts may be engaged sequentially to arrive at that altered state of consciousness.

An evolutionary theory suggests that the brain may be recapitulated in life processes, such as in the development of the human embryo. The individual life cycle recapitulates the evolution of the race. Joel Henning picks up on this idea by stating that perhaps a similar kind of

⁴Kostrubala, p. 109.

⁵Joseph C. Pearce, The Magical Child (New York: Dutton, 1977).

psychic recapitulation occurs during a long distance run.

We begin to run as a lizard or dinosaur may have, for self-preservation. We must be fit to escape our enemies and to maintain the health of our basic body parts, the heart, lungs, and limbs. So we go on, to achieve our second wind and limbic system is now engaged and we have recapitulated our evolution to the state of the puma, loping through the high grass at the forest's edge. Finally, we reach our highest, our truly human level, at which thoughts and insights bring us to the edge of unique human awareness, a state of bliss.⁶

This is an exciting concept to me, to consider the idea that long distance running, which is a very steady state of cardiovascular functioning, may somehow, in some way make connections that enable us to have a kind of mystic or religious experience. Amid some of the pace and stressful conditions of urban life, I see running as one way in which a person may enhance his life and spirit. Whatever our age and condition, it's as though we hear an echo coming down through several million years of our heritage telling us to function, stimulate our bodies and tune ourselves to the harmony of our biological heritage. To me it is both visionary and primitive to see that running may open those internal doorways which make us feel connected. We become whole persons.

There is yet another refinement concerning the neocortex of the brain. Researchers tell us that it is divided into a left and right hemisphere, each with somewhat specialized functions and each controlling the opposite side of the body. The left hemisphere generally involves the verbal, rational, and practical functions, the most recent evolutionary developments of the human brain. The intuitive functions such as spatial understanding, musical ability, dreaming, and other

⁶Joel Henning, Holistic Running (New York: New American Library, 1978) p. 44.

human functions that go much further back in our evolutionary history, are governed by the right hemisphere. Western man tends to be dominated by the left hemisphere. He is rational and logical, and therefore can realize the importance of staying in good physical condition and perhaps talk about the reasonable use of play, leisure, games and joy in his life. On this basis alone, the activity of running has practical purpose and valid reasons for doing it. But it sounds like work for persons to go out and do something just because it may be good for them. At the beginning stage of any sport, game, or activity there is the necessity of having to work at it. And there are no shortcuts to fitness, although there are many ways to achieve such a goal.

By contrast, the person who runs in the spirit of play is stimulating his right brain. He experiences a primitive, sensual world, temporarily repressing his verbal, rational, modern self. He is the hunter again as he was a million years ago and for most of human history. I have fantasized and felt that image while running in rocky hills, through some woods, or along the edge of the bay or ocean. I enjoy the environment with its smells and sounds and settings, as well as my images of the run.

Persons with whom I come in contact, especially in a counseling situation feel that they are missing something in their lives. There's a discontent and a feeling that their life lacks meaning. The tendency to compare what one has or doesn't have, with others leaves a feeling of disappointment. When I ask people where they find pleasure, joy, fun, more often than not, they expose deprived lives. The world is hard, factual and dull with no surprises, and little or nothing that

one would call play. We seem to major in factual, logical, goal-oriented living and have neglected the festive, the playful and the right side of the brain.

Depression is characterized by both physical and emotional symptoms. Where depression has tended to become habitual and disabling in a person, Kostrubala has found running to be a useful therapeutic tool in its treatment. He has used running therapy with patients who were schizophrenic and was amazed at the result. He feels that the sample is too small yet to present clear statistical evidence but he believes that running will take its rightful place as a useful form of therapy.

From a perspective of therapy, running seems to open the door to the right side of the brain where the sensuous, feeling, intuitive capacities open up. It is this dimension of intuition which is needed to balance our lives and I believe find more of one's personal meaning and significance.

Running can produce an altered state of consciousness. Perceptions seem to open up and a runner is changed by the experience. What one can see, hear, and feel is somehow enhanced. It's as though one moves to an internal rhythm and an external harmony with the environment. The runner experiences a part of his unconscious. "After running slow long distances, there is often a complete relief of tension and anxiety. The runner is washed out from within."⁸

Most runners can testify to that experience in some form.

⁷Kostrubala, p. 112.

⁸Kostrubala, p. 144.

Another feeling has been described as "runner's high," a euphoric sense of well-being or floating, totally synchronized with self and the universe.

More and more the feelings of runners are being studied. Exercise has been found to counter depressed feelings by increasing one's feeling of self-esteem and independence. In our society there are large numbers of people who experience depression. Expectations of failure and feelings of helpless dependence are counter-balanced while that person is exercising or completing a run. Depressed persons often think they are inherently worthless and undeserving of what helps them to feel better, to have better health, to look attractive, and to have fun. But when they treat themselves to a walking or running activity, that self-degradation is greatly diminished.

The sense of well-being that comes with running is documented in a number of reports. Frederick Harper of Howard University did a research project designed to assess the psychological changes that occurred when students worked their way up from a quarter mile to several miles of running. Among the results reported by the participants were decreased anxiety, greater sexual appreciation and a better feeling about themselves, including positive feelings about their body. In a study at Purdue University, sixty middle-aged faculty and staff members, all of them in sedentary jobs, participated in a four month exercise program consisting chiefly of running. Their personalities were evaluated, both before and after the program by a personality questionnaire. As they became more fit, the subjects were found to become more emotionally stable, more self-sufficient, more imaginative and more

confident.⁹

In my experience, persons who are depressed, wallowing in self-pity and nursing their hurts tend to be immobilized or passive. Such persons can push their bodies into activity only with a great deal of effort. But for those who do, that initial effort and discomfort pays dividends. There is a sense of delight in finding that their bodies can move and function like a healthy animal. There is a joy in feeling one's body pumping rhythmically, and eventually, automatically. I think that "self-hypnosis" might describe the altered state of consciousness that is achieved.

The simple, basic functions of walking or running gives the person a feeling of being in charge of such things as one's heart rate, breathing and muscles. There can't help but be a sense of mastery which stands in sharp contrast to a feeling of helplessness or weakness.

It is significant to me that many books and articles by and about runners are really personal testimonies that underscore the dividends of running. A woman runner said that her jogging is very symbolic of her active participation in her own life. Another woman said that she experiences a complete unification of body and mind. In various ways, people have tried to explain to me how running is a way of discovering their larger selves.

Running is an illustration of a person being in control of one's life. If an individual makes running part of regular or daily routine, the person is selecting what can be a highly pleasurable event and reinforcing that self-mastery.

⁹Fixx, p. 18.

A neighbor once told me that she read about people becoming addicted to running. I replied that it just couldn't be true. I'd been running for sixteen years, and I should know. Of course, there is definitely an interpretation of one's commitment to a life-style pattern which can be classified as an addiction. It is this theme of addictions in life, contrasting negative and positive, in which William Glasser finds the meaningful, life-changing values of running. He says that running is the surest way to a positive addiction.¹⁰

Negative or destructive addictions weaken the personality as well as interpersonal relationships. A glaring illustration is alcoholism. Addicts are totally involved with their addiction and have given up on finding self worth and love. The negative addiction dominates one area and weakens all others.

Positive addictions will be life enriching in the sense that energy seems to be poured into one's life rather than being drained of strength as negative addictions do. Those who are addicted to some destructive factor are dominated by that addiction. The positive addict enjoys the addiction but it does not dominate one's life. One gains a dimension of strength which is used to accomplish whatever one tries to do more successfully. To be obsessed with something that is positive, worthwhile and enjoyable seems to give a person strength to gain more love, more worth, more meaning and zest from life in general.

Running fulfills all the criteria for a life-strengthening addiction. It is noncompetitive and an activity to which you can devote about

¹⁰William Glasser, Positive Addiction (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1976) p. 40.

one hour a day. It can be done easily and without a great deal of mental effort, and, although you may enjoy running with others, it doesn't depend on someone else. Walking or running is something one can do without self-criticism and you are the only one who measures your own improvement and value.

Running is our most ancient and still most effective survival mechanism. We are descended from those who ran to stay alive, and this need to run is programmed genetically into our brains. When we have gained the endurance to run long distances easily, then a good run reactivates the ancient neural program. As this occurs we reach a state of mental preparedness that leads to a basic feeling of satisfaction. It is less self-critical than any other activity that we can do alone.

There is a genetic need to run. Watch a child. You will see that it is almost as if the child has to consciously learn to walk but not to run. The parents of a two or three-year-old nag their child to slow down, to stop running. A neural program written millions of years ago, urges the child, like a puppy, to run naturally. One has no choice but to try to develop this activity, which is needed much less for survival than one's ancient ancestors, but it still is needed. It is hard to grow through childhood if you can't run. It is only in very recent times that most adults haven't had to run for survival.

It is because this activity is so non-self-critical and so completely programmed in the ancient pathways of our brains that when we run without fatigue we are able to free most of the brain for other activity. When this happens it is easy to slip into the euphoric, unique positive addictive state; that comfortable hypnotic trance.

The rhythm of running is trance inducing. Sometimes problems get solved while I am running or I think of things to say to people but it is not a figuring out process. It is nothing one could call analytical; more of a sudden flash of insight that comes when you are least trying to find an answer. I think worrying and running are impossible to do at the same time.

The idea here is that the brain takes care of things on its own when it is given a chance and it may unconsciously solve problems, perhaps with just a flash of insight.

One runner describes physical and mental satisfaction, feeling that everything is all right, the elimination of worries. He found he couldn't carry a personal or job problem all the way through a run. They fade into inconsequence. One can experience a heightened awareness of light, temperature, and odors, sometimes an inexpressible joy.

These kinds of experiences are closely related to meditation. The clearing of consciousness, the ability to find a central focus within, the delight of a clear mind, the sense of refreshment of the soul are reported by those who practice meditation and by long-distance runners.

I know several people who have connected their experiences of slow long-distance running with prayer and religious insight. They have found a sense of being closer to God and to others and to the universe while running.

The meaning of sport and play sheds light on the experience of running. Johan Huizinga's "Homo Ludens: A study of the Play Element in Culture" argues that man is not best defined as "Homo sapiens" (man

the wise) or "Homo faber" (man the maker) but as "Homo ludens" (Man the game player). This is so, Huizinga says, because we have a propensity for turning all aspects of life, no matter how serious, into games.¹¹

Thus, if we accept the idea that our lives are games, might not it also be true that what we call games are in fact a deeper part of our lives than we may have previously suspected? Sport teaches us lessons in human limits. Because sport offers no hiding places, it also teaches honesty and authenticity. In short, it teaches us something about personal wholeness and integrity. And if we give it the respect and attention it deserves, it teaches us something about joy.

Several needs are fulfilled when we run. First is the need for movement. Here again we can see the illustration of a child at play. Running, resting, and running again. Then later in school running becomes institutionalized--on a football field or in baseball. And once out of school we hardly run at all, as though our style of living leaves no time at all for running. We are programmed to strive for a more passive, comfortable life-style. But the need to run never leaves us.

Then there is the need for self-assertion, which is often pushed down. Running gives us a socially acceptable way of asserting ourselves, of being as competitive--either with ourselves or with others--as we want to be. There is also the need for alternations of stress and relaxation. In alleviating stress often a change of activity is as good as or even better than rest. For example, when either fatigue or interruptions prevent us from finishing a serious project or problem, it is

¹¹Fixx, p. 20.

better to go for a swim or a run than simply to sit around. Substituting demands on our bodies for those previously made on the intellect not only gives our brain a rest but helps us avoid worrying about the frustrating interruption. Stress on one system helps relax another. Thus we avoid either a mental or physical breakdown by deliberately directing stress at varying body systems. It's a matter of balance and harmony.

Then there is the need for mastery over ourselves. Too many of us live under-disciplined lives with little to struggle for or against. The urge to struggle lies latent in everyone and the more restricted our lives become in other ways, the more necessary it seems to find some outlet for this self-expression and self-mastery. I believe runners are consciously or unconsciously seeking the deep satisfaction, the sense of personal dignity which comes when body and mind are fully coordinated and they have achieved mastery over themselves.

Although many of us virtually stop playing at some point in our lives, we never outgrow our need for it. We need to play. It not only keeps us young but also maintains our sense of perspective about the relative seriousness of things. Running is play, for even if we try hard to do well at it, it is a break from everyday cares and routine.

Unless we make a particular effort to set aside periods of time, our lives seldom allow quiet times for thought and meditation, without the telephone ringing or visitors coming in. Running gives us that time. We may let our thoughts just wander freely.

Running lets us adjust our lives to our rhythms. "Rhythm is as much a part of our structure as our flesh and bones," according to

Bertram Brown, director of the National Institute of Mental Health. Large portions of our lives are plagued by schedules imposed upon us by other people. Running offers an escape from that and enables us to live to our own rhythms.

It would seem that running may indeed fulfill some of our important psychological needs and subjective testimony leaves little doubt that running does enhance mental health. There are theories as to why this happens. One is that the brain, nourished by an unusually rich¹ supply of oxygen because of running, responds by calling into play its self-correcting mechanisms. Another is that the body and the mind are so closely linked that when you help the body you help the mind as well. Runners seem to like their bodies and think about how they function and are more in touch with themselves, a heightened awareness.

Carlyle H. Folkins and Wesley E. Sime have reviewed the theory and research relating physical fitness training to mental health. They found that research on the psychological effects of physical fitness training has been inhibited by the lack of conceptual links between body and mind. Psychologists have tended to view the mind as separate from the body. Physical fitness educators on the other hand have generally assumed that physical fitness is important to mental health, based upon the organismic view of the mind-body relationship--healthy body, healthy mind.¹²

Fitness training has been positively associated with reduced absenteeism, and reduced risk of heart disease. Moreover, exercise

¹²Carlyle H. Folkins and Wesley E. Sime, "Physical Fitness Training and Mental Health," American Psychologist, 36, (April 1981) 373-89.

breaks on the job appear to reduce errors and improve output. Work performance and attitudes improve. Physical exercise appears to be important to sleep behavior. Little has been discovered on the effects of fitness training on social behavior or sexual behavior.

Research indicates an improved sense of well-being associated with fitness, a sense of improved life-quality. In studies relating fitness to anxiety and the stress emotions, almost all outcomes have been positive, that is, improvement in mood states. The personality research showing the highest correlation has been that which focuses on self-concept variables. That is, person's attitudes and evaluations of aspects of their self-body traits, abilities, etc. does improve. Research has demonstrated that fitness training does promote a stronger, healthier self-image. Reports suggest that running therapy can be used to inhibit phobic and acute anxiety and is a viable treatment for depressed patients.

While psychological aspects of running may elude precise measurement, there are nevertheless, strong indications of positive changes occurring. Some of these changes are changes in habits or self-control, in moods or even bizarre thought patterns. By running, persons may sublimate their feelings of anger and aggression. Certainly better physical stamina through the aerobic conditioning process of running is a worthy goal. Striving toward such a goal is an ego-strengthening activity in itself. It moves one into the arena of self-discipline, self-control and to a higher level of self-confidence.

As a psychiatrist, Kostrubala sums up the psychological impact on his patients and himself:

We all changed our life habits. Smoking decreased, then stopped. Drinking followed the same pattern. My obesity fell away. Depression lifted. Destructive relationships were ended by improvement or separation. Excessively bizarre thought processes were eliminated without destroying the verve of spontaneity of that person. New friends appeared. In short, the group was successful, and the combination of running and therapy seemed to be the key.¹³

¹³Kostrubala, p. 115.

Chapter 2

THE THEOLOGY OF PLAY APPLIED TO RUNNING

It is my contention that running is a channel of play and enjoyment in which we can feel our freedom and with that liberation, experience the joy which allows us to breathe freely and to celebrate our authentic human existence.

Currently, it seems to me that our culture is filled with the supporters of play in human life. Psychologists and psychiatrists, doctors and physiologists, sociologists and economists encourage play and leisure activities. Play is good for losing weight and reducing our various health risk factors. Play is good for relieving stress and returning us to work relaxed. Play maintains our health and promotes longevity. It compensates for needs not met in other ways and provides a harmless way to vent negative emotions. In fact, play is advocated as a necessity in a leisure society.

All of these are sound and acceptable reasons for play. I believe that these are sound and acceptable reasons for running, a paramount expression of play.

To be a runner, or to engage in any aerobic exercise activity because you derive joy and fulfillment from it, is play from a theological perspective.

Jürgen Moltmann, in his essay, "The First Liberated Men in

Creation," poses the question: How can I play in a strange land? Is there really such a thing as freedom in the midst of slavery, joy in the midst of suffering, and praising God in the groaning of his creatures?"¹

Everyone has a burning desire for happiness and enjoyment. But our world gives us little cause for rejoicing. To be happy, to enjoy ourselves, we must above all be free. But such freedom has grown scarce. We enjoy ourselves, we laugh, when our burdens are removed, when stress is alleviated, when pressures yield and obstructions give way. Then our lives lighten and we suddenly find it easy to cope with other people and our circumstances. We gain distance from ourselves and our plans move forward in a natural, unforced way.

A liberating form of enjoyment is at the heart of Moltmann's theology of play. He believes that in playing we can anticipate our liberation and with laughing rid ourselves of the bonds which alienate us from real life.

Questions of existence have traditionally been utilitarian: For what purpose am I here? Am I useful? Can I make myself useful? What service can I render? The traditional Puritan ethic of hard work, nose-to-the-grindstone purpose and accomplishment justified creation. This is indeed Homo Faber, Man the Worker. And this is the question of Homo Faber in whose world of labor everything must have a purpose and for whom the purposeless is senseless, meaningless, and evil.

Christian eschatology has never thought of the end of history

¹Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Play (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) p. 2.

as a kind of retirement or payday or accomplished purpose but has regarded it totally without purpose as a hymn of praise for unending joy, a dance of the redeemed, and as the complete harmony of soul and body. Christian eschatology hasn't portrayed the joy of existing in the new, redeemed and liberated creation in terms of this life damaged by trouble, labor, and guilt, but it has portrayed it in descriptions which for all of us go back into childhood. One becomes like a child. The analogies come from childhood, not from the world of struggle and victory, or work and achievement, of law and its enforcement, but from the world of basic childhood trust.²

The theology of liberation, as I understand it, is the very ground upon which, or within which the theology of play can grow. If persons are what they make themselves, then their being human depends on what they do. At this point Luther countered with the theme of "justification by faith." Here we have been accepted and loved by God just for being. Thus, we know the experience of being justified and loved by God without reference to our works or deeds. Luther wrote, "Free works are then works freed from the purpose and the necessity to justify oneself." Like grace itself they occur for nothing, that is, for the sake of pleasing God and out of love for the neighbor. Freed from self-assertion and self-searching, free works are done spontaneously and unselfishly, as if you were playing.

Another issue arises when society asks the questions: "What do you have? and What do you do? The values of having and doing obscure

²Moltmann, p. 35.

the value of being. One's social value is measured by what one is able to produce by labor and by what one can afford to consume or possess. A person derives self-esteem and identity from what one has and what one can afford to have. One is aware of oneself as a thing and experiences oneself in the body one has, in money, house, children, social position, in the power and standing which one possesses. Everything is answered in terms of having or not having. Apart from what one possesses or lacks, one is nothing. Whether people actually avail themselves of the positive opportunities of being human depends less on conditions than on themselves. An increase in leisure time does not automatically assure an increase in human freedom or better opportunities for self-realization.

When we look seriously into the meaning of play, it seems that the source of that identity begins with Johan Huizinga's concept of Man the Player, *Homo Ludens* and his study of the play element in culture. Huizinga said, "In the form and function of play, itself an independent entity which is senseless and irrational, man's consciousness that he is embedded in a sacred order of things finds its first, highest, and holiest expression."³ "The form and function of play" may be understood in broad terms of games and leisure, sports and festivities. We may even suggest that all of life is a game, or made up of games which we play.

My source theologians seem to view man's literal games as an extension of meaning, of our serious everyday life. The games of people

³Huizinga, quoted by Harvey Cox, The Feast of Fools (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969) p. 142.

reveal a great deal about them. Games are a sort of artificial paradise like Disneyland, or some Utopian vision by which we interpret and complete the meaning of our daily lives. In games we devise means of imagined or vicarious participation in the larger drama of our time. Not only is our playing an extension of our working life, but our working life's meaning is an extension of the games we play. We are all players. Play is the metaphor of the meaning of our lives.

My thesis is that running may be one of the most basic and pure forms of play and that running is a metaphor of life. Creative playing still remains a tremendous achievement aimed at driving us to uncover our true humanity which still lies hidden for most of us.

When Moltmann applies the justification of faith concept to our modern achievement-centered society, we are liberated not only from outside determination and exploitation but in a much deeper sense also from the compulsive notion that we are what we produce. So we are set free from bad conditions of production, the guilt trip of never producing enough. We need no longer be ashamed of ourselves and consequently we don't have to prove ourselves anymore. We find our humanity in the awareness that we have already been accepted and loved as we are.⁴

Harvey Cox believes that we need a rebirth of patently unproductive festivity and expressive celebration! He says we need a renaissance of the spirit, and there are signs that it is coming. He argues from theological premises that man will grasp his divine origin and destiny only if he regains the capacity for festive revelry and the ability

⁴Moltmann, pp. 56-57.

to fantasize and to play.⁵

Cox's perspective echoes that of Moltmann in that something has happened that has undercut man's capacity for festivity and play. In Western civilization we have placed an enormous emphasis on man as worker and man as thinker and less emphasis on man's celebrative and imaginative faculties.

In some of the older historic statements of the purpose of human life, there was an emphasis on glory and joy. According to Calvin, the purpose of man's creation is to glorify God. "To glorify God and to enjoy him forever," said the Westminster catechism of 1647. Man shall give glory to the true God and rejoice in God's and his own existence, for this by itself is meaningful enough. Joy is the meaning of human life, joy in thanksgiving and thanksgiving as a joy. When we ask, For what purpose do I exist?, the answer does not lie in worthy or practical purposes establishing my usefulness but in the acceptance of my existence in which the meaning of life allegedly lies in rendering service, being useful, and having purposes. Our traditional cliché says, be good for something or you are good for nothing. When a person sees the meaning of life only in being useful and used, he necessarily gets caught in a crisis of living, when illness or sorrow makes everything including oneself seem useless. This is a society which values and rewards us only in terms of practical usefulness and our suitability as laborers and consumers.

Play as a symbol goes beyond the categories of doing, having,

⁵Cox, p. 10.

and achieving and leads us into the categories of being, of authentic human existence and rejoicing in it. It emphasizes the creative against the productive and the aesthetic against the ethical. We find relief from the burden of work and responsibility in rejoicing, dancing, singing, and playing. When we work, or assume responsibility, our "yoke is easy and our burden is light."

Those areas of life reserved for human freedom such as vacations and leisure and pleasure simply may serve to strengthen and stabilize our work ethic. If we as humans possess the dimension of being festive and fanciful, we must learn again to dance and to dream and to recapture a festive affirmation of living and an alternative to the daily routine of work, convention, and drabness. The Christian world-view enables us to play and enjoy ourselves, others and God.

Festivity is a form of play. And whatever can be termed play provides a short vacation from convention. Without social approval for the departure of the norms of ordinary behavior, playing would not be playing. Sometimes in doing the festive activity, we "live it up" or "dress up" and wear things that would be stared at curiously on most occasions: funny hats, daring dresses, exotic shirts, even rows of medals and crimson sashes. And for running as a playful, festive activity we might add skimpy running shorts of every color: "T" shirts with an endless array of designs, slogans, and advertisements, and all wearing some model of a comparatively new invention called the "running shoe."

That which is festive or playful is noticeably different from everyday life. It embraces the moment. It is functional in the here

and now. It is a time set aside for the full expression of feeling. It consists of an irreducible element of "living it up." It says yes to experience; it entails joy and provides us with a short vacation from the daily routine.

The athlete who is in complete command of the skills of a sport comes to understand the person one is through commitments to a particular sport and the personal response to the stresses and strains that arise in it. One finds out what one is made of, so to speak. What one's true being is. One is in fact, a totality interacting freely with the environment. The individual experiences the integration of body, mind, and spirit.

The games and sports and celebrations through which we play are many. The great American team sports which capture the fans and spectators are football, baseball, basketball, with soccer and hockey starting to find places. These all have their places in our society at both amateur and professional levels.

My focus on running as the optimum, individual, aerobic activity serves to illustrate what others may find for themselves in bicycling, swimming, racquetball, tennis, walking or hiking, golf or bowling. Exercise that is drudgery or labor or something done only for the final result lacks the spiritual element. If work is something you have to do, then we might look at play as something we do not have to do but simply want to. The function of walking or running starts within the body. For one's body to be all it can be implies dedication, desire, and discipline. It also requires a motivation for self-renewal and joy which are the very ingredients of play.

For each of us, as a unique individual, must heed our own inner calling to our own play. We must attune ourselves to the person we are and the person we can become. Then, do what you do best and feel best at. Participate in that dimension of play that gives you self-acceptance and a feeling of completion. Perhaps in doing that there will be moments when you are one with the universe and with the Creator.

Sam Keen shares the existentialist insight into the incarnate nature of human existence: "A man's body is his bridge to and model of the world; therefore, as a man is in his body so will he be in the world."⁶

The importance of being carnal is Keen's theological antidote to the traditional Christian posture that true grace, healing, or salvation is dependent upon recognizing and confessing the Lordship of Jesus Christ and accepting the authoritative witness of the church that he is the revelation of the nature and purpose of God. Thus, salvation in the fullest sense involves a form of historical knowledge which is possible only to the person who is incorporated into the community of Israel and is guided by the religion of the book. Memory rather than awareness is the crucial faculty for arriving at an understanding of God's grace and truth.

The traditional Christian version of what heals and saves tells us that the individual must turn aside from bodily sensations, involvement in nature, the current cultural and political situations, and look back into the history of ancient Israel.

⁶Sam Keen, To A Dancing God (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1970) p. 148.

Orthodox Christian theology has placed the focal point for the authentic life on simply hearing the word of God or being initiated into the history of Israel. The emphasis is backward to these ancient points of time. Unless we are able to locate the presence of that which heals and saves in our contemporary existence, we will be dependent upon some external authority telling us that the grace of God comes to us by hearing the word and knowing the acts of God in ancient Israel.

There is a deep rejection of the body and situated existence at the heart of the traditional Christian notions of history and salvation. We are removed from the immediate, the experiential, and the sensual, that grace which comes from the "gut feeling" rather than the brain. Incarnation means grace is carnal, healing comes through the flesh. The primary locus of the "action of God" is in the viscera, not in ancient Israel. This visceral theology therefore demands reawakening of the body, the resurrection of the bodily, a new awareness of one's physical being. If there is a connection between the carnal and the sacred, then the church must become involved in the exploration of ways to reawaken a reverence for the body and its rhythms. It is time for the church and this generation of clergy to see channels of grace in our physical existence. The word must be rediscovered in the flesh. Religion must return to dance and play and joy. Zorba is the minister for our time, dancing to affirm life in the face of disappointment. If the church fails to develop a visceral theology and fails to help modern man rediscover and reverence his flesh and his feelings, it will neglect a powerful means of grace as the seed from which compassion grows. It will thereby turn its back on the incarnation of the sacred in our history, in our flesh.

Religion must therefore regain its awareness of the relationship of the sacred and the carnal.⁷

The element of grace in common experience has, I believe, a clear example in the spirit of running. Grace is a sudden reorganization of perceptions, attitudes, and dispositions which results in a relaxation of inner and outer conflicts. It is a freeing up of previously bound energies for projects and relationships which are satisfying and fulfilling to the maturing self. Grace is a happening rather than an achievement, a gift rather than a reward. One does not run for grace, it just happens. One's flaws are seen and accepted as well as one's possibilities.

From the athlete in sports and the player in games we learn that health is a positive quality, a life force, a vital characteristic clearly recognizable in those who have it. In sport, in play, and in running as a particular form, I feel we possess a personal "arena" where we find the best that is within us and catch glimpses of who we really are, in harmony with ourselves and the universe.

I have the notion that most of us think of religion as something out of the past that promises something about the future and we ignore the present and immediate and experiential. Running as play is somehow encountering the self and self with the world. There is a kind of reconciliation of the artificial separations of body and mind, of conscious and the unconscious, of pain and pleasure. A runner has found play and has found one's own body which he accepts and perfects. It is

⁷Keen, p. 160.

almost strange to say that one could experience the grace of God or find the meaning of life by engaging in such a simple, primitive activity. But I believe that is the case. Play theology provides a framework for us to recapture the joy and celebration of our being alive and a part of nature.

The meaning of life is found in a kind of revelation that may be present in each of us, to be found where our heart and lungs, our blood and muscles whisper to our unconscious. The runner is continually having a daily encounter with the universe on that inward journey. The runner illustrates the advice to become the person you can become. "I run, therefore I am," not only affirms oneself, but affirms the necessity of play in the light of which no life is a failure.

Hugo Rahner in his book Man at Play, writes:

To play is to yield oneself to a kind of magic, to enact to oneself the absolutely other, to pre-empt the future, to give the lie to the inconvenient world of facts. In play earthly realities become, of a sudden, things of the transient moment, presently left behind, then disposed of and buried in the past; the mind is prepared to accept the unimagined and incredible, to enter a world where different laws apply, to be relieved of all the weights that bear it down, to be free, kingly unfettered and divine.⁸

I suggest that this describes the mystic and graceful experiences of the runner. Listen to this reflection of a runner "As I run, I feel the whole of me working. My body has to be alive. It has to work. My heart surges ahead. I am dancing a special dance of life. Somehow, I am glorifying life, defying death in all its forms. Right in the snapping teeth of death, I dance and laugh. Knowing in a vague yet entirely wonderful way that this is the way I give honor and glory

⁸Hugo Rahner, Man at Play (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967) p. 65. Cited by Cox, p. 147.

to God."⁹

Keen defines the task of theology as an "empirical mapping of the variety of the human experiences of the sacred." Theology at its best is the study of the appearance of the sacred in human experience. This is the continual exploration of the changing ways in which grace and meaning appear in human experience. In pursuing this task it can utilize many different disciplines and language games in search of those elements which actually function to render human life more graceful and meaningful. Running fulfills these elements, enabling us to possess our experience, to live our own life and to become all we are. It is here that we pursue our own perfection, not just in running, but running as play.

In play you can realize simultaneously the supreme importance as well as the insignificance of what you are doing. And then, accept the paradox of doing what at once is essential and inconsequential. In that freedom of play is where you have those moments, a "coming together of things," the "appearance of the sacred in human experience," that self-acceptance and feeling of completion, moments when you are fused with your universe and your Creator.

⁹Thaddeus Kostrubala, The Joy of Running (New York: Lippincott, 1976) p. 146.

Chapter 3

HOW THE CHURCH RUNNING GROUP WAS FORMED

In my work as minister and counselor in the church, I have tried to face honestly some of the problems and opportunities which are faced by single adults in our population. Estrangement, separation, alienation, and divorce are common themes of lonely persons who come to the church for support and rebuilding some of their life structures.

Originally we offered a growth-group experience designed for single persons who would want to become more "fully alive." That became the theme of the growth group, "The Fully Alive Experience" which utilized material from John Powell's books on self-understanding. For those who wished there was also the opportunity to add the physical exercise program of running or walking.

A thirteen week course was offered with a registration fee that covered the cost of books and mimeographed materials. The first meeting was an orientation and getting acquainted time in which participants were given the option of making a commitment and actually registering for the series or not.

This was a group of single persons whose median age was in the upper thirties, who had the shared experiences of a broken relationship and the depression and confusion which often follow. The needs and the feelings began to surface and be shared in an atmosphere of trust and friendship. Typical questions were: How does one face the feelings of

loneliness which almost seem to paralyze? What about my fear that I will be unable to put my life back together again? I feel rejected, like a failure. When one is so depressed, how can one make decisions? Why do I seem to be withdrawing from people and activities? Members talked about putting off or avoiding activities because they felt they didn't belong, like the proverbial "fifth wheel."

How can one learn to accept oneself as a single person in a world, and particularly in a church, which seems to say that marriage and the family constitute the only normal, healthy life? Help for single adults has been one of the gaps in the traditional church as a family oriented institution.

It was in this context that these people came together to explore their feelings, examine their attitudes and perhaps, open up new friendships. Each was suffering the pain or memory of emotional fractures, and each was searching for wholeness and self-acceptance.

My years of running has been good for me; it was simply a personal exercise program from which I benefited. Up until this time I has not thought of encouraging others to get into running. It was just an exclusive experience to me and my small fraternity of running friends.

Running had done marvelous things for me in terms of my own survival from separation and divorce. It seemed to drain off anxiety, lift me from depression, and enrich my life-style.

To introduce the idea to the group, I invited the Y.M.C.A. director to come and speak on the theme of exercise and fitness. My intent was to encourage and inspire persons to start their own fitness program in conjunction with our growth group experience. Another week,

I showed a film by Dr. Kenneth Cooper, the famed aerobics expert, who focuses upon running as the optimum, complete cardiovascular, pulmonary fitness activity. On another occasion I used a film called "The Boston Marathon," filled with the pain and the exhilaration of marathon running.

I invited any member of the group who wished to do so, to meet with me an hour before our group sessions for exercise and to wear whatever they had to exercise in: jogging suits, shorts, tennis shoes, etc. I offered to teach them what I knew about running.

Those first few weeks of getting started were fun. The first ten people had never done anything like this before. And they each had their own unique motivation, attitude, and physique. Several who did not have running shoes to begin with, bought them. They wore a variety of outfits: shorts, slacks, and warm-up suits.

We began each session with about fifteen minutes of basic warm up exercises: arm swings, head and torso rotations, leg and thigh stretches. All to "let our bodies know" that we were going to get into action.

The location of the church is in a commercial, business area on a service road, adjacent to a freeway. Certainly one would not ordinarily choose such an area to go out for a little pleasure jaunt in running togs. But, that was where we were. And that is exactly what we did.

Patience and care would describe how I approached those first four to six weeks. There were many variables within this little group: age differences, weight differences, health levels, and two who had jogged a little in the past. I had to be certain that no one would do

any more exertion or stress than they were capable of doing. I also wanted to be sure that the participants derived some pleasure and satisfaction in this little "sub-group," activity.

Most people can start out with a little activity and then build themselves up. The key is to start slowly and monitor one's reaction. I taught the members to do this by taking their own pulse and interpreting what that meant in terms of their level of fitness.

To do this, I used a simple stress test devised by the Committee on Exercise and Fitness of the American Medical Association. It requires you to step up and down on a bench or high curb, etc., for a few minutes, then see how quickly your heart recovers from the effort. We divided the group into pairs for this exercise. With this buddy system, one did the exercise while the other did the timing and pulse-taking.

This is how it works. One steps up and down from level ground to a height of fourteen to eighteen inches approximately thirty times a minute for four minutes. Participants could stop sooner if they felt they should or wanted to. And some did.

As soon as a person finished, their pulse was then taken by the partner, for 30 seconds one minute after finishing; another 30 seconds two minutes after finishing; and another 30 seconds three minutes after finishing. The Recovery index then uses this formula: The duration of the exercise in seconds is multiplied by 100. Then, taking the sum of the pulse counts times two, the duration time is divided by that figure to give your recovery pulse rate and fitness level indicator.

If the recovery figure is 60 or less, the fitness level is poor; between 61 and 70, fair; between 71 and 80, good; between 81 and

90, very good; 91 or more, excellent. The test is quite strenuous, so most of the participants could not go up to four minutes. To all of them, it was a demonstration that they were out of shape. Some more than others, of course. The message to me was to go slow and easy and "under-do" rather than over-do.

The warm-up time stimulates the circulation and raises body temperature, which is especially important to one who is middle-aged or older, but I believe necessary preparation for anyone to engage in sport or exercise.

Thus with all the preliminaries behind us, the group went down the drive to the service road where each one was to walk or jog or alternate. The route was the sidewalk which went past numerous automobile agencies, some office buildings and a furniture store; the distance was about three fourth's of a mile.

Away we went. And indeed, each did seem to have a different pace, except for those who chose to walk or jog together. I made a point of spending a little time with each one during that period of time: running with the runners and walking with the walkers, making comments and observations, asking how they felt, encouraging them to be aware of their breathing, their stride, the swinging of their arms, their posture, and most of all, the playful spirit of doing what we were doing.

Now that I reflect on those and subsequent sessions of the running group, I may have looked like a training coach or a cheer leader. But it felt to me like pastoral care and I was having a wonderful time doing it.

When the walking/running group returned to the church, a few would change their clothes, but most of us simply went into our growth group, running togs and all. Churches don't usually have shower and dressing room facilities, and we were no exception.

When the thirteen week series was completed for the growth group, the ten members of the running group felt they were only beginning and wanted to continue.

The decision was made to meet on Saturday mornings at a cove area of Mission Bay and each would bring something for a brunch after the run. That time and place and practice continues after one year. There have been a fluctuating number of participants, from six to sixteen people.

Weather has not been a serious factor in the running/walking group meeting. Although heavy rains curtailed several of those Saturday mornings, some members of the group came in fog and cold, mild rain or sunshine. They would bring juice or coffee, fruit or rolls, coffee cake or doughnuts for brunch afterward.

The pattern of pre-activity warm-up has continued. A circle was formed and we began loosening up with some arm swings, torso twists, side stretches, then gentle toe touching and bending stretches from the waist, and finally with leg and achilles tendon stretching. We have used a picnic table for stretching the hamstring muscle by putting one foot on the table and leaning down with our nose toward the knee.

From this beginning, members of the group then started out at their own pace, but synchronizing their watches. Usually we went around the bay for 30 minutes at our own pace, then turned around so

that all in the group arrive at the starting point at approximately the same time.

This is when I allotted my time between individuals at different levels of ability. Some will only and always be walking. Others will alternate walking and jogging. Still others will run the four or five miles within the given time frame. My role was to encourage and inspire these individuals, whatever their capacity for aerobic conditioning was.

It was understood by all who participate that the Saturday morning running group was to be an inspiration for developing their own daily patterns of the same exercise.

But on Saturday mornings, we all knew that we were a fellowship exulting in our own aliveness, feeling a special relationship to the dawn, the sea, the hills, the gulls and mud hens, the clouds and air, and most assuredly feeling that special closeness with one another.

There were those Saturday mornings when I had other ministerial commitments such as a meeting, a funeral, or a wedding. On those occasions I simply came in my suit and tie and joined in our opening warm up ritual. Sometimes I just brought a change of clothes to expedite my schedule.

The cross section of vocations represented were nurses, teachers, a librarian, accountants, a computer programmer, receptionists, a clothing store manager, a hospital maintenance worker, an engineer, a paralegal, and retired persons. One woman in the group is on a dialysis machine three times a week. Another is an alcoholic under psychiatric care. Two women have run their first races in the ten kilometer distance. (6.2 miles).

9. Describe your state of mind while walking or running.
10. Would you recommend a walking or running program to a non-walking or non-running person? Why?

Eleven members of the group were surveyed by this questionnaire. Only two had done some running prior to becoming part of the group over one year ago. Four of the members are walkers, seven are runners and all engage in their walking or running activity at least three times during the week. Six members report that they enjoy this activity most of the time; five stated that they always enjoy it.

In response to question number five on the physical benefits of the program, all participants affirmed that they generally felt better. Six specifically mentioned increased endurance and more energy. Six of the members noted their improved posture and better muscle tone. Five described a reduction of stress and four noted that their blood pressure and pulse rate were better.

Question number six referring to changes in feelings about one-self included such themes as more confidence, a sense of accomplishment and pride with increased self-respect. Question number seven relates to this in asking how the program has affected one's self-image. All answers include a more positive self-image, self-confidence, and looking and feeling better generally.

In response to question number eight concerning outlook on life, there was a greater appreciation of the beauty of nature as well as a personal concern for health habits and well-being.

Describing one's state of mind in response to question nine evoked statements of being relaxed, enjoying the scenery, feeling free, yet finding inwardness and a sense of renewal.

Question number ten about recommending walking or running to another brought a unanimous affirmation. The reasons included statements about a healthier body, feeling better mentally, and putting things in perspective. In the following personal responses to the questionnaire, the actual names of the participants are not used.

Marie is a woman in her mid forties who describes what the program has done for her. "It's done wonders for making me feel I can accomplish something for myself, to benefit myself physically and psychologically. It has also helped me develop some social contacts. I have finally stopped thinking of myself as a failure, physically and emotionally, with the realization that I could make myself enter into and stick with an activity that required both physical and interpersonal effort. I feel a sense of accomplishment and a desire to continue." She also feels that she has increased her stamina, lowered her pulse rate and can reasonably eat anything she wants without gaining weight and she is able to sleep better.

Prior to participating in the running group, she described herself as being extremely self-effacing and spineless. She suffered through a divorce with a feeling of helplessness and inadequacy. She believes that her old lack of self-confidence and unhappiness has been dramatically changed through her participation in the running group. Her weight loss and change of body image are equally dramatic. One Saturday morning when she presented herself to the group in new shorts and "T" shirt and new shoes, she did it with child-like glee. She is justifiably proud of herself and what she has accomplished. One leg being smaller than the other because of polio has not hindered what she

has achieved, but she has learned that she can stretch beyond her limitations.

Several members of the group are walkers and either cannot or prefer not to attempt running. One such member is Jane who said, "I feel proud to know that I am doing even a little bit to create a healthier body and mind. Walking is especially beneficial when I have occasional times of depression and discouragement. I like being active. I am not interested in sitting around feeling sorry for myself." This, from a woman who is on dialysis treatment three days each week. When she describes how the walking has affected her self-image she says, "I think of myself as a healthier, more relaxed person now, It's a good balance for my rather bookish nature. I feel friendlier toward people, less inhibited and shy. I have more confidence in my own personal abilities, more eagerness to try something new, and an even greater appreciation of one's gift of life." She likes walking with others for companionship as well as walking alone for meditation.

In describing her walking experience she is quite poetic. "I am very relaxed. I prefer walking among the beauties of nature...and as I walk I breathe in the beauty of white clouds against an azure sky, soaring gulls, green grass and trees, the fresh scents, the feel of cool breezes and warm sun sparkling on the water."

We are fortunate to have in our area some beautiful parks and beach areas which are ideal for walking or running. And what Jane is describing is a common experience for members of the group, a feeling of oneness with nature.

She goes on to say that "Sometimes I try to solve my problems,

but mostly I feel warm thoughts of people I love, the joy of life itself, fantasies of what I'd like to be, goals of what I'd like to do with my life. Usually, I am deeply inspired. How cannot one believe there is a God when He gives us such beauty!"

Although Kay, a secretary, may be approaching age fifty, she said she feels more like twenty-seven since joining the group and running. Her new theme song is, "Everything's Going My Way."

Her outlook on life has been affected in that she "enjoys nature more: feeling the wind, watching the clouds, admiring the blue of the sky, seeing the sun pop over the hill, enjoying the quiet and the freshness of a new day, basking in the sun-splashed land...makes me feel that I have no cares, that each day is a glorious day and I am mindful of the Creator. It's great to be alive and well and I love life!"

Kay is one in the group who progressed enough to actually run a ten kilometer race and is proud of her "T" shirt and bib number and accomplishment.

She feels that her state of mind while running gives her a "happy-go-lucky, free-as-a-breeze feeling" and at other times it is like communing with God and a quiet time for problem solving.

Losing weight has given her "joy in being able to buy a size or two smaller in clothing...and what a high! when a friend or stranger says "hey, you're looking good." "I have to chuckle at the interesting invitations I've had lately."

Running has given her "a feeling of rejuvenation, much like the oil can eliminating the squeak from the door hinge." She said, "I couldn't imagine running and exercising in an hour, before joining this

group. I have developed endurance, improved my posture, colds go away faster, and (running) actually tightens one internally and appears to lessen female problems. My mental alertness and sense of euphoria is such that I can't imagine starting out the day any other way."

She also attests to a new feeling of independence and self-confidence along with a new set of friends with a common interest.

Don is a man in his late forties who recently retired from the Navy and has carried his computer specialty into private industry. Coming through a stressful and angry divorce left him bitter and extremely distrustful. Prior to running with the group he described himself as being very aggressive and outspoken, impatient when anyone else made mistakes and able to hand out criticism at the "drop of a hat." He saw himself keeping distance from people and just getting more cynical about life in general and his own life in particular.

After joining the Saturday morning group and taking up running he talks about how his feelings about himself have changed. "I feel much more positive about myself. Running was one of the keys toward liking/loving myself and seeing a new self-worth. My self-image has been affected positively through running, due to appearance and endurance."

He says that he is no longer a pessimist and his old resentments seem to have melted. It (running) has given him time to look at many things other than himself and to diminish the apparent magnitude of his own problems. "Running offers time for meditation, introspection, being with my Lord, or just enjoying other people around me and the surroundings." The physical benefits which he mentions from run-

ning are, "stress reduction, weight control, physique trimming, and a feeling of well-being."

It was perhaps two months after our running group started that Betty came up to me afterward to tell me that her doctor had noticed very positive changes in her personality and attitude and asked her what she was doing differently from the past. It took her a few minutes of reflection before she answered with, "I've just taken up running." It was for her, a happy realization that being in the group and running was doing good things for her. She is an alcoholic and was under psychiatric care at that time. Her self-perception has undergone a dramatic change from self-condemnation and sadness to a much more hopeful and responsible position of warmth and cheerfulness.

She reports "My self-image has been greatly improved, and since I am actively the one doing something (the running) I have more self-respect. And since I feel better about myself I have a much better outlook on life."

Betty has actually had to alternate walking and running, due to a mild asthma condition and her physical benefits from this program includes experiencing not as much shortness of breath. She also says that her muscles are firmer and she just feels better physically. But she reports that the major changes have to do with being a more delightful person and she's now able to have fun and be more playful in her life. She has taken pride in having her running outfits color-coordinated, along with several others in the group.

She has taken a new hold on her profession and has a new feeling of competence and energy in her work.

Joan is a librarian, a woman in her fifties who never married. She is strictly a walking participant and always enjoys walking with someone. Her participation in the group alerted her to have more concern with preventive health care and opened for her the importance of exercise, nutrition, and good health habits to maintain "well-being."

Since being in the group and walking regularly she feels that she has become less irritable and more patient and has overcome some shyness. She says that she has a better, more positive self-image with more "up" in her feelings. She has taken a greater responsibility for herself and is now in charge of her own well-being.

Joan describes her state of mind while walking in these terms. "My mind is freed-up, I feel more mellow, the scenery lifts and expands the spirit, more in touch with the basic rhythm of life, a sense of self-renewal and fellowship with companions."

Ellen is a receptionist for a medical office, a demanding and sedentary job. She has been working full time ever since her husband died of cancer about four years ago. She is in her late forties and her third child left the home last year.

Before she joined the group to walk and run, she saw herself as an extremely docile, dependent wife who was controlled by a strong-willed dictatorial husband. From his death, she went through a long period of grief and guilt, loneliness and resentment. Her changed outlook on life she attributes to the group experience of exercise. She alternates the walking and running. But starting with a weight problem, she states that she now has a better figure, feels better, has more energy, lowered her blood pressure, and has a release of tensions. "I

have a much better self-image than before. I feel and look better...a more positive outlook on life with less time for self-pity."

Another person who is a walker in the group is Marcia, a retired secretary who never married. The group is her inspiration but her walks during the week are with her dog or another friend. For her, walking is "soul food" and has taught her to enjoy the moment, the day. Her doctor corroborated her walking program, but advised her not to run. She is in her early sixties and extremely thin in physical frame.

Her participating in the Saturday morning group and developing a regular walking routine has given her more "self-confidence and self-respect; I feel more satisfied with myself and I seem more 'open' to people, activities around, and scenery." Her walking has made her more aware of the importance of her health, her diet, and her attitudes. While walking she feels relaxed and "notices objects you can't notice in a car going fifty-five." This has helped her work on her posture and toned up her muscles.

She feels that her image has been strengthened to where she now "makes a good impression" on others and has become more assertive and effective in her own life.

Before becoming a part of the walking/running group, Karen described herself as being an extremely cynical, rebellious person who went from one job to another because of conflicts with her bosses or other employees. She would always "speak her mind" no matter how blunt or caustic. Her critical, complaining ways left her without friends, for the most part, and depressed most of the time.

Karen is an accountant in her late forties who has undergone the

most dramatic change in her self-image and outlook on life, since joining the exercise group. She states that before coming into this program, she seemed to be just asking people to reject her. The changes she describes since being in the walking activity are very warm and positive. "I now feel good about myself, and I feel good about others." Her statement, "I seem to be more charming," would be echoed by all who know her.

It was only two months ago that Ron began to run. He is a man in his forties who has just made a job change. He feels that running has already helped him "to put certain things into better perspective; I'm not so prone to worry or be anxious about incidentals. I began my program at a critical time of job change and I believe it has helped and is continuing to help me in the transition." He also feels that he has become less irritable, less outspoken and has more energy. "Running represents victory over an attitude of carelessness with regard to myself and to physical exercise." He believes that his "state of mind while running provides me with a great deal of inwardness and solitude with a significant amount of pride in my whole self."

A profile of life qualities was designed to determine what, if any, changes occurred in the lives of group members attributed to the walking/running program. This was a list of twenty-five items for which they could simply check the degree of change from none to very much.

CHANGES SINCE WALKING OR RUNNING

<u>QUALITY</u>	DEGREE OF CHANGE:	NONE TO VERY MUCH					
		0	1	2	3	4	5
Aliveness		/	/	/	/	/	/
Confidence		/	/	/	/	/	/
Joyful		/	/	/	/	/	/
Freedom		/	/	/	/	/	/
Happiness		/	/	/	/	/	/
Self-Discipline		/	/	/	/	/	/
Well-Being		/	/	/	/	/	/
Cheerful		/	/	/	/	/	/
Calmness		/	/	/	/	/	/
Hopeful		/	/	/	/	/	/
Purposeful		/	/	/	/	/	/
Playfulness		/	/	/	/	/	/
Thankful		/	/	/	/	/	/
Fun-Loving		/	/	/	/	/	/
Optimistic		/	/	/	/	/	/
Awareness		/	/	/	/	/	/
Enthusiasm		/	/	/	/	/	/
Positive Self-Image		/	/	/	/	/	/

WHAT PHYSICAL/BODY CHANGES HAVE YOU NOTICED?

	DEGREE OF CHANGE:						
		0	1	2	3	4	5
Weight Loss		/	/	/	/	/	/
Pulse Rate		/	/	/	/	/	/
Endurance		/	/	/	/	/	/
Genral Fitness		/	/	/	/	/	/
Breathing		/	/	/	/	/	/
Sleeping Habits		/	/	/	/	/	/
Eating Habits		/	/	/	/	/	/

Twelve group members responded and showed the following order
of categories in which the highest amount of change took place:

1.	Thankfulness	12
2.	Positive Self-Image	10
3.	Aliveness	9
4.	Well-Being	9
5.	Happiness	9
6.	Optimistic	9
7.	Confidence	9

The following are the most improvements recorded in physical/
body categories:

1. General Fitness	8
2. Endurance	7
3. Pulse Rate	6
4. Breathing	5

Becoming more thankful led the list in degree of change followed by a more positive self-image. The next five qualities ranked together in the amount of change recorded: Aliveness, Well-Being, Happiness, Optimistic, and Confidence. The least changes were measured as Calmness, Purposeful, and Hopeful, which apparently did not directly relate to or was influenced by the walking/running activity. The least improvement in physical categories were eating and sleeping habits.

Chapter 5

ENCOURAGEMENT AND GUIDELINES

FOR A CHURCH RUNNING GROUP

Every person can have a new and richer life through a new vision and the aerobic conditioning activity of running. Every human being can in some measure be the architect of his life. Inner attitudes can change the outer aspects of our lives and vice versa. To a great extent, our lives are in our own hands.

Encouraging people to become physically active and get in touch with their bodies at a level of appreciation and sensitivity is a ministry and a service. I believe that an effective way of achieving this is to encourage persons to walk or run and to find themselves in the spirit of play. The human body was not made for inactivity but for functioning. When the beneficial effects of activity on the heart and circulation and respiratory systems are absent, the measurable factors of fitness suffer a breakdown of equilibrium.

In a way, there are two types of successful fitness programs. One is rational, practical, physiological; the other nonrational, mystical and psychological. One is obligatory; the other voluntary. One is aimed at changing the person to fit the life-style; the other aimed at changing the life-style to fit the person. One is utilitarian; the other creative. One is work; the other play. I'm for play.

The first step is to obtain the commitment of a group of people who want to be more vitally alive than they are at present. They may be unfit, out of shape people who are simply dissatisfied with how they feel and look and live. Perhaps they are in the category of people who want to repent of their past sins. Maybe they'll be people who have had disappointments, hurts and frustrations and want to turn things around. Sometimes there will be an attitude of personal rebellion at the stresses of living. Persons may want to run for health or aesthetic reasons, or from self-pity or anger. Any and all of the above motivations for exercising may be there in the beginning. And I believe that any and all of them will be dealt with positively and victoriously by running or walking.

Advantages

The church sponsored running group has some advantages over professional fitness centers. There is no gymnasium, locker room or showers. There is no membership fee for this activity and you will be with a caring group of fellow Christians in an atmosphere of fun and play. The members can choose where they want to meet and wish to run. It is a group without officers, dues, or membership roles. Just a handful of people who want to live life more fully and get in touch with who they are. Keep the sessions fun with an openness to talk about themselves and running, or anything for that matter. The subjects may range from weight and diet to what someone heard or read about the folklore of running.

Remember that the group is to be the source of encouragement, inspiration and information once a week. Each individual will be walking

or running at his or her own pace at least three times a week, or, preferably every day. I believe that you have no limits as to age, sex, or the numbers in a group.

Physical Cautions

Most people can start out with a little activity and gradually build themselves up. The fitness levels of participants may vary a great deal, but each begins at one's own level. If one is seriously overweight or has a tendency toward high blood pressure or breathing problems, that person should have a physical checkup. People who are badly out of shape may try to do too much too fast and become easily discouraged. The goal at this stage is to build the foundation for a more vital, joyous life-style and not a quick-fix miracle program. A complete medical stress test can provide all the fitness data one could ask for, and more than most people would like to know! It would be a good thing for persons over forty who have not been aware of their level of health or endurance to have that information to start.

Because my experience has been with middle-aged and older adults, I will present these guidelines for beginning with such people. A running regimen of a few miles a week is something one has to work up to gradually, with perhaps the goal of running for an hour at a time, three to five times a week. The process should be completely enjoyable as one progresses, gains confidence, and becomes healthier.

Members of the group should have an awareness of their target heart rate and how to take their pulse. Everyone has a maximum heart rate generally based on their age and physical condition. In general terms, the maximum heart rate will be 220 beats per minute, minus your

age. In aerobic conditioning exercise programs, the "target" heart rate is the goal. This is around 70 to 85 percent of one's maximum heart rate. The target heart rate is the key to conditioning. To check one's level of exertion, one simply stops exercising and takes the pulse reading to monitor being in the vicinity of that target heart range.

Most people know how to take their own pulse, but it is good information to teach the group. Each person can check their own resting heart rate as well as their target heart rate during a run. Just place three fingers over the artery near the center of the wrist. Touch the fingers lightly to that area until you can feel the pulse. Then using a stopwatch or second sweep hand, count the number of pulses for 10 seconds. Multiply that number by 6 and you have the heart rate in beats per minute.

The cardiovascular fitness program that is most effective is aerobic conditioning. This depends on how efficiently the body uses oxygen and the rate at which the heart beats is directly related to how much oxygen is being used. It is primarily through the work of Kenneth Cooper that we understand the efficient use of our oxygen-processing mechanism and why that individual target heart rate being sustained does its strengthening. The following Target Heart Rate table is a suggestion for understanding one's effective functioning level.¹

¹The Runner's Almanac, (New York: Beekman House, 1978) p. 175.

Age	Your Maximum Heart Rate	Your Target Heart Rate	Target Heart Rate Range
20	200	150	140 to 170
25	195	146	137 to 166
30	190	142	133 to 162
35	185	139	130 to 157
40	180	135	126 to 153
45	175	131	123 to 149
50	170	127	119 to 145
55	165	124	116 to 140
60	160	120	112 to 136
65	155	116	109 to 132
70	150	112	105 to 128

Your Target Heart Rate represents the number of times your heart can safely beat per minute and still get sufficient aerobic training.

This is actually a very conservative table and the target heart rates on similar charts may show higher pulse counts for aerobic effects. I would rather be on the modest side for a church group.

Some groundwork in these and similar factors are important in the beginning. The approach here is that we are doing something new and functional with our bodies which will, with time and patience influence our entire quality of life and spirit. The pleasure of friends in a group is a support system which makes this activity both nurturing and fun.

Profound and fundamental changes will occur in one's body, but they are changes that just can't be rushed. Both the group leader as well as the participants must be aware that getting into good condition may take many months or even a year or more, especially if one is over thirty or forty. But now the evidence is that running may be the most efficient form of exercise and the payoffs go well beyond fitness into one's psyche and life-posture. One's self-appraisal and outlook on life

are changed in positive ways.

There are more practical details which I will come to later but let us now begin with the people who have come to your running group. Each is wearing what they feel will be comfortable for walking or running and will have accounted somewhat for whatever the weather may be. You may have five or six or ten or twelve people, it doesn't matter. Men and women and youth. Even youngsters may be a happy addition to your running group.

The Warm-Up

Now it is time to begin. Form a circle for the warm-up exercises with enough space for each person to swing their arms freely. The longer one runs, the more important the preliminary stretches are. So I believe it is a good habit or ritual to start with. I start with arm swings, then shoulder rotations, then head rotations just to loosen up. Then we bend from the hips gently downward with feet apart and hands reaching toward the ground. From this position we can touch one toe, then the other, coming back to an upright, hands on hips position. Repeat the exercise six to ten times. Then we twist the torso gently around to the right and then the left several times to flex those muscles. Because our group meets in a park where the grass is wet and the ground is cold we do not do the basic stretches which require one to lie down. But please have your people understand their importance. They are the bent-leg sit up where one lies on the floor with knees bent and simply comes to a sit up position and back down again, striving for about twenty repetitions. The other is the back over stretch which is for the lower back and the hamstring muscles. Lie on the ground or

floor, then keeping your legs together, slowly bring them over your head and with your knees straight, hold your legs in that position for twenty to thirty seconds. Some are able to touch the ground over their head with their toes.

The hamstring stretch also helps flexibility and is one which every runner should do. Picnic tables are good for this. Put one heel on the table with your knees locked. The other leg is straight. Then simply bend toward your knee and you can feel the muscles stretch on the back of the leg. For an added sensation, I've asked members to point their toe toward their nose.

These exercises and stretches will eliminate undue stiffness and provide a more flexible and free flowing body. If persons are over thirty or forty, it is especially important to keep muscles in balance and counteract the tightening of certain muscles which can occur after a few years of long distance running.

Running/Walking

Now we are ready to go. An hour of exercise means thirty minutes in one direction and turning around to head back to the starting point. But remember, each participant may be at a different level. Some will walk. Some will alternate walking and running. And others may run. They may go individually in pairs. Or threesomes or four-somes. When two or more are walking or running they will be chatting along the way. If they are running and talking, that is a sign that they are not overdoing or getting winded and it provides companionship along the way.

Many people feel that they have to have a special place to run, but actually any place that's relatively smooth and safe from traffic will do. My personal preference is to run in parks with trees, grass, shrubs and scenery. Our church running group uses the bay park for our weekly gathering. Residential areas with all the varieties of homes and landscaping may be more convenient but just as enjoyable. Most walkers or runners will just start out from their own front door during the week days and explore their own routes and trails in their neighborhoods. Then as proficiency and confidence increases, one can take to the hills, take to the beach, or go sightseeing in any part of their town or community.

Every individual body is unique and different from everyone else's. No two people will ever look the same in running styles. But there are some general guidelines which apply to nearly everyone. In running along with group participants, I may make some comments or give some suggestion and encouragement. Most people have to be reminded once in a while to keep their body straight and their head up. I tell them to lift their vision to a distant hill or tree or the horizon. Their immediate path is still in their sphere of sight, but they can be free to run tall and enjoy the scenery. Arms and hands are relaxed and the elbows are bent and people seem to develop their own natural swing which is in harmony with their stride. I have experimented with people on the run to have then change to some unnatural rhythm of arm swings and their stride, and it is almost impossible to do anything other than that which comes naturally. The length of one's stride is also in this category. Each one may be quite unique. I never suggest that anyone

consciously shorten or lengthen their stride. Running faster or slower is mainly a matter of changing the speed to the footfalls. Then the length of stride takes care of itself.

The entire body should be relaxed in running. This includes the hips, knees and ankles. The foot should strike the ground heel first then roll forward, pushing off with the ball of the foot. Although my personal style is to run more flatfooted.

Breathing is another natural process which doesn't require any conscious thought. But at times it is a delight to notice one's breathing and pay attention to the process of exhaling for two or three strides, then inhaling for one, then feeling how one's breath is synchronized with the arm swings and the stride and the pace. That is part of the fun and play of running, to feel the harmony of oneself functioning as a spiritual animal. That simple process of breathing in oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide is participating in a universal energy exchange between oneself and nature and seems to open the channels to the spirit of God and the life force. I love the imagery of breathing in health, vitality and strength and breathing away toxins, waste and illness.

When the members return to the starting point, we share brunch together. I suggested this when we first began and the members went overboard with coffee cakes, danish and goodies. Now we are doing better with fruits, juices, some pastires, and coffee. But there is a group bonding that occurs after the exercise hour in that twenty to thirty minute fellowship. I recommend this ritual to every church running group. A prayer of thanks and a word of blessing means a great

deal in such a setting.

Suggestions for diet and nutrition can be found everywhere but I have not attempted to be a mentor to my group in this area. In my experience, runners tend to eat less meat and more health oriented foods whose nutrients haven't been processed out. I feel that a balanced diet of all the food groups is the best and should fulfill all the energy requirements for people in a program of running. That means a fairly balanced intake of vegetables and fruits, whole grains, fish, poultry, eggs, and milk. Although some runners take vitamins C and E and perhaps others, the use of vitamins and minerals is not in my realm of expertise. Nor have I felt deprived for not using them. It seems a good rule to eat foods that agree with you and avoid foods that disagree with you. It also seems a good rule to run on an empty stomach and an empty colon. This also applies to walking or any form of exercise.

Shoes and Clothing

Improvements in running shoes have been dramatic over the years since I began to run in regular tennis shoes. Today there must be fifty different brands and styles to choose from. A good running shoe is an investment which should be made. Gym shoes, sneakers, deck shoes or other casual footgear will not substitute for running shoes which are designed for that forward running movement. No other kind of shoe is made to absorb the impact of weight on one's foot striking the ground. If one is not wearing an adequate shock-absorbing shoe, the accumulative impact of running will be carried up through one's ankles, knees and hips and may eventually result in injury.

Each year, Runners' World magazine has rated the various brands of shoes on more criteria than one needs to know. But from such reports, there are running shoes that have five star ratings (tops) down to two stars. Some of the companies that fulfill the best measurements in such tests are Brooks, New Balance, Adidas, Puma, Nike, and Converse. My personal favorites are Brooks and New Balance shoes, but there are more which any running shoe store may offer. I recommend that the person get one-half to one size larger running shoe than their regular dress shoes. I know from experience that this will avoid any problems to the toes or foot and give maximum comfort. I prefer footlet socks which give air circulation around the ankles, but that is just an individual preference.

Nylon shorts and cotton "T" shirt is the running outfit of choice in warm and comfortable weather. When the temperature is cooler, such as the 50's or 40's, then sweat pants and top, jacket or sweater, or a warm-up suit will be appropriate. I have an old pair of work gloves that I wear for running on chilly mornings. Sometimes I wear a knit cap. So-called warm-up suits are often very expensive leisure suits which you cannot throw in the washing machine. A fancy garment such as that is not necessary for running.

Only twice has our church running group been deterred because of heavy rain. We have met and done our walking and running in light rain and mists, fog, sunshine, and combinations of them.

No matter what age a person may be or what level of fitness one may have, the church running group can provide the inspirational non-judgmental fellowship in which all can play the game in which everyone

is a winner.

Beginning the Program

There is an utter simplicity and poetry in walking and running. Walking first of all can be done by anyone, anytime, anyplace. It doesn't even look like exercise and it is non-competitive. It is the least demanding of all exercises, can be done by people of all ages and the benefits are great.

Running is just the extension of walking, and because of its basic simplicity of function, nearly anybody can do it. The same physiological dividends come to the plodder as well as to the fleet runner, and it can be continued all one's life.

In the mind of the typical beginner, getting into shape is a fairly simple matter. Just go out and do it. But there are changes that occur throughout one's body which cannot be rushed. Getting into good condition is likely to take longer than some people think, especially if they are over thirty-five or forty years of age. Thus, a gradual program from easy to strenuous is the best approach. The training program in the Runner's Almanac presents such guidelines. Individuals will proceed at their own pace and the following schedule is one in which anyone involved can feel secure.²

²Runner's Almanac, pp. 177-82.

Level One: Beginning Your Program

Level One is your introduction to the exciting world of the runner. A program of brisk walks will get your body in shape for the time when you actually start to run. Walking is also a beneficial cardiovascular exercise, one mild enough for almost everyone to enjoy. As your physical condition improves, try more challenging walks: cover a greater distance or walk uphill. This will enable you to maintain your target heart rate.

Stage	Duration of Exercise (Minutes)	Frequency (Times per week)	Activity
1	15	3 or 4	Walk
2	17	3 or 4	Walk
3	20	3 or 4	Walk
4	23	3 or 4	Walk
5	26	3 or 4	Walk
6	30	3 or 4	Walk

Level Two: Starting To Run

In Level Two, you add running to your exercise program. Start with a 50/50 ratio of walking to running. As you progress from stage to stage, gradually increase the amount of time you spend running and reduce the time you walk. By the time you reach Stage 4, you may run throughout the exercise period. If you wish, you may continue to combine walking and running. Be sure to maintain your target heart rate.

Stage	Duration of Exercise (Minutes)	Frequency (Times per week)	Activity
1	18	4	Run/walk
2	20	4	Run/walk
3	23	4	Run/walk
4	25	4	Run or run/walk
5	28	4	Run or run/walk
6	30	4	Run or run/walk

Level Three: The Accomplished Runner

By the time you reach Level Three, you will be a veteran, one of those runners you used to envy. You may run throughout the exercise periods or combine running and walking, whichever is most important for you. If you decide to stay at Level Three rather than moving on to Level Four, you will continue to strengthen your cardiovascular system as long as you maintain your target heart rate.

Stage	Duration of Exercise (Minutes)	Frequency (Times per week)	Activity
1	33	4	Run or run/walk
2	35	4	Run or run/walk
3	38	4	Run or run/walk
4	40	4	Run or run/walk
5	43	4	Run or run/walk
6	45	4	Run or run/walk

Level Four: The Advanced Runner

Level Four is for the dedicated runner, one for whom running is intensely pleasurable. Once you reach Stage 6, you may experience the euphoria known as the runner's "high." In any case, you can consider yourself an expert. You may run throughout the exercise period or combine running with walking as you did earlier.

Stage	Duration of Exercise (Minutes)	Frequency (Times per week)	
1	48	3 or 4	Run or run/walk
2	50	3 or 4	Run or run/walk
3	53	3 or 4	Run or run/walk
4	55	3 or 4	Run or run/walk
5	58	3 or 4	Run or run/walk
6	60	3 or 4	Run or run/walk

The spirit of running or walking as part of one's life-style is affirmed for me in a statement by Wilfred Peterson. It provides an inspirational perspective on body, mind, and spirit and reflects the experiences of members of the walking/running group involved in this study.

The Art of Walking

Walking (Running) exercises the whole person.

Walking (Running) exercises the body. It gives the arms and legs a workout. It stimulates the flow of blood; expands the lungs. It is gentle and relaxing.

Walking (Running) exercises the mind. It shakes up the brain cells. It fills them with oxygen; drives out the cobwebs. A famous scientist says he does his best thinking on the two miles of sidewalk between his home and office.

Walking (Running) exercises the emotions. It gives you a chance to observe and enjoy the world. Open your eyes to beauty. See the homes, the trees, the gardens. See the shining faces of little children. Listen for church chimes, singing birds and the laughter of happy people.

Walking (Running) uplifts the spirit. Breathe out the poisons of tension, stress and worry, breathe in the power of God. Send forth little silent prayers of good will toward those you meet.

Walk (Run) with the sense of being a part of a vast universe. Consider the thousands of miles of earth beneath your feet; think of the limitless expanse of space above your head. Walk in awe, wonder and humility.

Walk (Run) all times of day. In the early morning when the world is just waking up. Late at night under the stars. Along a busy city street at noontime.

Walk (Run) in all kinds of weather. Experience the glory of earth coming back to life in springtime; the warming rays of the sun in summer; the zest of October's bright-blue weather; the rugged desolation of winter. Walk in the rain and in a blizzard.

Walk (Run) alone mostly, but if with a companion, choose one who knows the secret of quietness.

Walk (Run) for fun and adventure, for health and inspiration.

And when you go for a walk (run) remember these words by Elbert Hubbard;
"Carry your chin in and the crown of your head high. We are gods in the
chrysalis."³

³Wilfred A. Peterson, The Art of Living (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961) pp.24-25.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Perhaps at no other time in history has the need for exercise to improve biological functioning been so great. People once stayed fit through sheer hard work, but with urbanization, automation and technological advances we have become sedentary. Traveling by automobile has become a way of life. Television locks us into our living rooms. Even many suburban home developments don't bother to build sidewalks on the assumption that nobody walks any more.

Inactivity permeates society and seems the symbol of the leisure class. Americans have been in an age of physical inactivity although there are now signs that the bleak statistics are turning around. Over half the deaths in this country are cardiovascular related and reaching younger age levels. Of all the countries in the world, American women have the highest death rate from heart disease. I believe there are good and sound reasons, theologically and biologically, why we do not have to die too soon or enjoy life too little.

Running is not a panacea for finding longevity or enriching one's quality of life, but I am convinced that running or some kind of aerobic conditioning activity makes a powerful contribution to "living life to the full." Running may act in influential ways on other good health habits. It is something like a gyroscope which seeks to put all systems into balance, biological, mental and spiritual. Our life-styles need not be set and determined. We can choose to be free and play and

enjoy our very existence. Our daily habits and their accumulative effect has a great deal to do with whether we are sick or healthy, whether life is dull or colorful, whether we view life as misery and suffering or a joyous game in which we participate.

From a religious standpoint, the theology of liberation is clearly translated into the theology of play. I believe that play theology finds poignant expression in running. The psychological consequences of running have been shown to be positive and life-enhancing. The physiological dividends of incorporating running into one's life are well documented.

To test whether the church should encourage the activity of walking and running was the basis for this experimental project of a walking and running group. The goal to enable persons to feel more fully alive seems to be not an end, but the beginning of a process. The initial growth group experience simply included running as an option but now I know that the running phase of that program has far exceeded the influence of the listening and "head trip" meetings, as enlightening as they were. The participants in the walking/running program have set a course for a life-style pattern for better health, more energy, more life-affirming. Aspects of life long habit patterns are hard to break, but some new vision of well-being is the testimony of all the group members.

The positive results of this project affirm the meaningfulness of such a group. Participants all reported that they felt better generally and acquired a more positive self-image. They increased their endurance and energy levels and reduced stress. Thankfulness, aliveness

and well-being were qualities that increased a great deal for the members, along with confidence, optimism and a general feeling of fitness.

The formation of a walking or running group in the church is a ministry and a dimension of pastoral care in a very functional, preventive way. If every human being is striving to find their own perfection, why shouldn't one's body be included in the journey? Within the context of a running or walking activity I believe a new awareness and appreciation of life opens to us. Such an activity is an opportunity to treat one's body as if it were the only body one had, and to pursue one's own perfection in the spirit of play and in the present moment.

Play theology opens wide the door of integrity and authenticity to activities that have been seen as anathema to the religious life. Games and festivity, celebration and joy somehow become eroded in the eyes of the institutional church and a God of judgment. Humans have been typified as purposeful, work-oriented creatures born in travail to a life of trial and tribulation.

A theology of freedom and play brings a much needed corrective by saying that play is where life is lived, where the game is the game, that our vitality and joy can be expressed and that we do not have to justify our existence or worthiness by some measure of performance. What a breath of fresh air!

To me, the reasons for running go far deeper than all the physiological benefits, as important and good as they may be. Sport and play and exercise are vital to the process of maximizing ourselves and finding the quality of our lives rather than the quantity. It is my thesis that running or walking does it very well.

I believe that our lives can be more fulfilled by such activity. It's as though one can start a trend toward "youthing" rather than aging. Wherever there is such play we are engaging in, not only fitness, but self-discovery and becoming more the persons we were destined to be.

Yes. I believe play is a proper activity for human beings and a walking/running group in the church exemplifies the truth that life is a game in which every participant can be successful.

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